

NORTH CAROLINA MAIN STREET CHARRETTE/RESOURCE TEAM REPORT

ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA

NOVEMBER 2002



Rocky Mount Resource Team/Charrette Report

Information in this report is provided by the resource team members as noted and edited by Main Street Program Director Rodney Swink. Copies of this document were printed by the City of Rocky Mount.

This report represents a synopsis of ideas and recommendations from a North Carolina Main Street resource team/charrette visit to Rocky Mount. The team was comprised of people with expertise and first hand experience in the downtown revitalization issues faced by communities such as Rocky Mount. Team members were selected by the Main Street coordinator after consultations with the local program manager, interested citizens and local officials. Effort was made to include people with expertise in a broad range of community revitalization areas with special focus on design and economic restructuring. Team members were:

Hilary Greenberg, of Greenberg Development Services in Charlotte, NC, a business development and market analysis firm;

Perry Howard, FASLA, landscape architect and professor at NC A&T State University in Greensboro;

Don Rypkema, of Place Economics, in Washington, DC, specializing in real estate development and historic preservation;

Victor Sharpe, AICP, planning director for the City of Fayetteville, NC;

Stephen Stansbery, AICP, transportation planner with Kimley-Horn, Associates in Greensboro, NC;

Rodney Swink, FASLA, director, North Carolina Main Street Program.

The team spent three days studying the community, meeting with a wide array of citizens, and interviewing numerous people including elected officials, merchants, property owners, and others. The team reviewed work done previously in the community and particularly benefited from the efforts of the city's planning and engineering staffs.

The team wishes to thank the citizens of Rocky Mount for their warm hospitality and all of the many people who took time to meet with us and express their concerns for Rocky Mount. Our team would also like to give a special note of thanks to downtown manager Kaye Edmisten for not only making all of our arrangements but also for her preparation for our visit. Our work was made easier by all of her efforts and attention.

REPORT FORMAT

The information in this report will be presented in six sections – Introduction, The Twelve Elements of Successful Downtown Revitalization, Business Development, Planning Tools, Transportation Issues and Organization, plus an Appendix. This material was presented in a public forum on the evening of November 7, 2002. There is also a CD with the presentation information in PowerPoint format.

For more information on any of the issues raised in this report, contact the City of Rocky Mount or the North Carolina Main Street Center.

INTRODUCTION

Rocky Mount was first selected to be a part of the North Carolina Main Street program in 1982 but for a variety of reasons was never actively involved. They re-applied and were re-designated in 2001, joining 48 other North Carolina cities so designated. As such, they are all also part of a national effort. The National Main Street Center is operating in 43 states with over 1600 cities, urban areas and small towns involved in the Main Street approach to downtown revitalization. All of these communities and more are involved in revitalizing their downtowns because they have come to realize that downtown is important to the community's image, to its economic development, to its potential for continued community growth in jobs and businesses and to its quality of life.

Downtowns represent an important tax base - in many cases, the largest tax base in the community. They represent ideal places for job development and new business start-up. And downtown has a major role in a community's ability to successfully recruit new business and industry. While many communities have malls and strip shopping centers which play an important part in a community's retail climate, downtown is still the heart of the community. It is the cultural, financial, governmental and service center and still an important retail center. Downtown really is the window to the community, the window through which people can judge a community's sense of being and its self-image. It is for these reasons that investing in downtown with both private and public dollars is in fact an investment in the whole community.

The Main Street Approach and Principles

The Main Street Approach™ was created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Through their National Main Street Center (NMSC) they have refined the techniques necessary for successful downtown revitalization, and they have willingly transferred many of the lessons learned to others. The North Carolina Main Street Center, having participated with the NMSC in their initial demonstration effort, directs the Main Street program in this state through the Division of Community Assistance in the Department of Commerce.

The Main Street or Four Point Approach features organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring. It is under these umbrella issues that all downtown concerns can be addressed. Organization is the vehicle by which people come together to identify areas of common interest and decide strategies for moving forward. Promotion involves defining an image for the downtown and marketing that to people within and beyond the community. Design represents the physical image as well as the manner in which

downtown functions, both publicly and privately. Economic restructuring is the acknowledgment that the market for downtown has changed and we need to understand the forces of change and what that means for future development.

Several principles have emerged as equally critical to Main Street's success. Main Street is:

- Comprehensive--it does not focus on only one issue but instead looks to the inter-relationship of many issues;
- Partnership driven--no one individual or group can or should have to solve all of downtown's problems; rather it is through partnerships, especially among public/private/non-profit sectors, that success occurs;
- Quality--downtown must put forward quality in every way, whether it is through customer service or through the quality of public improvements, to be competitive ;
- Action-oriented--while planning is critical, success depends on making things happen to garner interest and support;
- Built on local assets--the best strategy for economic growth is to build on local assets, not to depend on external solutions or investments;
- Incremental/long-term--revitalization is best achieved through individual improvements, and their collective impact over time can be quite significant.
- Self-help--Main Street is truly a local program, and its success is directly proportional to the commitment and leadership applied locally;
- Management directed--the one significant distinction between Main Street and other good-faith efforts to revitalize downtowns is the requirement of full-time downtown management. Despite all of the interest and energy of volunteers, their accomplishments are limited by other commitments. A manager cannot only keep the momentum going between meetings but can also bring professional skills and knowledge to the tasks.

This report represents the observations and recommendations that came from the resource team/charrette assessment. We hope that it will become a guidebook for the continued revitalization and growth of downtown Rocky Mount. The resource team could not address all of the issues of concern in so short a visit and specifically did not address promotion at this time. But using the collective knowledge and experience learned from working in communities throughout the country, coupled with the knowledge of the community gained in a very intensive three-day visit, the team feels confident in making the recommendations in this report. Promotional issues will be addressed in a future visit.

The citizens and officials of Rocky Mount should study these recommendations, debate them, refine them, but by all means use them to shape a downtown revitalization program. Only through action can the process for downtown revitalization be successful.

The 12 Elements of Successful Downtown Revitalization

Don Rypkema, Place Economics

1. Leadership
2. Comprehension
3. Management
4. Partnerships
5. Public Sector Participation
6. Community Orientation
7. Diversity
8. Differentiation
9. Pedestrian Orientation
10. Market Sensitivity
11. Incrementalism
12. Forward Thinking



Leadership

- Local Champion for Downtown Revitalization
- Formal or Informal Overall Vision or Comprehensive Plan that Guides the Process
- Institutional Presence Downtown
- Stakeholders Responsive to Change
- Institutional Support for Downtown
 - Local Government
 - Financial Institutions
 - Utility Companies
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Economic Developers
 - Churches
 - Newspaper
- Community Leadership Committed to Downtown
- Downtown Organization path to Broader Community Leadership

Comprehension

- Understanding of the Importance of Downtown
 - Public Sector
 - Business Community Downtown
 - Business Community Elsewhere
 - Community at Large
 - *Clear Definition of Where Downtown Is*

Management

- Public/Private/Non-Profit Organization for Downtown
- Comprehensive Approach to Management
- Organization Tracking Change

Partnerships

- Among All Three Economic Sectors
- Interdependence
 - Among Businesses



- Among Buildings
 - Between Landlords and Tenants
- Interaction with Educational Institutions
- Participation
 - Opportunities for Participation
 - Active Participation by Newcomers
 - Participation by those without Vested Financial Interests
- Alignment with Close-in Residential Neighborhoods

Public Sector participation

- Regulatory Environment
 - Reinvestment Encouraged
 - Consistent Public Policy toward Downtown
 - Downtown treated differently in Planning and Zoning
- Public Improvements
 - Appropriate
 - High Quality
 - Well Maintained
- Mixed Use of Buildings Encouraged



Community Orientation

- Sense of Community Ownership
- Abundant Non-Economic Activities
- Primary Place of Public Expression
- Tolerance of Diversity
- Something for Everyone
- Serves Local Market
- Sense of Public Safety
 - Minimal Graffiti
 - No bars on windows
 - Good Maintenance
 - Businesses open during business hours
 - Minimum of dirty/unkempt windows & Entrances
- Significant Residential Component

Diversity

- Economic Diversity
 - Affordable Place for Incubation, Experimentation, Creativity
 - Wide Range of Rental Space Available by Size, Condition, Use
 - Predominately Locally Owned Businesses
- Arts & Cultural Activities Key Elements
- Functional Diversity
 - Business Center
 - Government Center
 - Arts & Cultural Center
 - Entertainment Center
 - Housing Center
 - Tourism/Convention Center



- Education Center
- Medical Center
- Special Events Center
- Sports Center
- Retail Center serving Downtown Markets
- Heritage Center

Differentiation

- Character Defining Resources
 - Identified
 - Enhanced
 - Protected
- Appropriate Use of Historic Resources
- Imaginative Reuse of White Elephant Buildings
- Physical Resources Used for Differentiation
- Doesn't Try to Compete with Mall/Office Park on *Their* Strengths
- Maintains & Capitalizes on Sense of Discovery
- Historic Preservation Key Component
- Concentration of Buildings with Meaning

Pedestrian Orientation

- People on the Street
- 18 Hours a Day Usage
- Circular Pedestrian Movement
- Automobiles Appropriately Accommodated but Not at the Expense of Pedestrians

Market Sensitivity

- Demand Driven
- Customer Driven*

Incrementalism

- No “Success Only” Mentality
- No “Bring Back 1956” Mentality
- Incremental Economic Change
- Incremental Physical Change
- Sense of Evolution
- Multiple Catalysts for Change
- “Trickle-up” not Quick Fix

Forward Thinking

- Capitalize on Emerging Opportunities
 - Locationally Indifferent Businesses
 - Extension of Work-at-Home
 - Growth Sector Businesses
- Center of Smart Growth Strategy



- National Connectivity
- International Connectivity
- Strategy of Economic Globalization
- Conscious Effort to Resist Cultural Globalization
- Technological Connectivity
- Public Transportation Re-Established
- Sustainability Strategies
 - Economic
 - Fiscal
 - Physical

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Hilary Greenberg, Greenberg Development Services

Restructuring a commercial district can be one of the most difficult challenges confronting a Main Street Program. Commercial districts are interdependent on many factors outside the district's control. Changes in highway patterns, local economic conditions and the changing role of America's commercial centers have complicated the restructuring effort. Over the past 20 years, Rocky Mount, like so many communities has developed a significant amount of retail space on its perimeter, with supply far outstripping current demand. Competition for retail dollars combined with deferred maintenance has resulted in a large supply of underutilized and deteriorated space in downtown's core.

Like many eastern North Carolina communities, Rocky Mount is working hard to reinvent its economic base and has made significant strides in improving educational and employment opportunities for its residents. Rocky Mount is fortunate to have strong private sector leadership and local government support for the downtown.

The National Main Street program has had tremendous success repositioning downtown and neighborhood commercial districts. Business development is one of four building blocks to a successful Main Street effort. Business development is the way in which a downtown organization can build an organized response to constantly changing market conditions. Development requires a thorough understanding of market and site opportunities and constraints and a development plan. Market understanding includes an assessment of demographic and economic conditions that affect commercial development, an evaluation of the competition within the trade area and a determination of target markets and niche opportunities. Site evaluation usually includes an assessment of building conditions, ownership, parking and traffic constraints and surrounding uses. From this analysis, a downtown plan can be developed that identifies type of uses and business recruitment, retention and property redevelopment strategies.

While it is understandable that some may wish for a "quick fix" for downtown through major projects, experience has shown that downtown revitalization is best achieved through many small deliberate actions. This is not to say that Rocky Mount's downtown does not also need additional catalyst projects like the library, train depot and pending Imperial Center to stimulate investment. Regardless of their size, downtown projects should promote the organization's vision for the future and maintain clear standards for development and adhere to basic development principals that encourage concentration and physical connectivity, reuse existing structures and minimize disruption to existing businesses. Without agreement on these basic standards, Rocky Mount will go from one project to another without long-term progress.

Below are some general observations and recommendations regarding the market and commercial base and recommendations for developing a downtown plan for Rocky Mount. These comments are based on background information and input received during a three-day visit to Rocky Mount.

MARKET AND SITE EVALUATION

Demographic

As part of a metropolitan statistical area, Rocky Mount is able to attract the attention of larger retail companies that require baseline population thresholds of over 100,000 persons. The fact that population totals for the city and Nash County are increasing also is important to prospective businesses. The largest target market is a blue-collar, moderate-income rural household between the ages of 35-44 with children. Retail sales for last ten years peaked in 96-97 and have been decreasing over the past few years due to weaker employment market and problems associated

with hurricane Floyd. Retail sales are still above 1990 levels and are higher than many surrounding communities.

Competition

There is significant commercial development in Rocky Mount. There are over 23 neighborhood and community shopping centers with over 2.5 million square feet of space. Vacancy rates range from 8-11%. Rents outside the downtown range from \$8-\$22, with average of \$10 per foot.

Site Observations

Downtown has many commercial uses scattered throughout its 78 blocks. While retail businesses once dominated, now only pockets of retailers exist, separated by vacancies and general service uses. Businesses do not benefit from shared customer patterns. Low rents have attracted price sensitive uses that target the lowest income groups or location neutral uses that require low rent space for storage or occasional meeting space. Many businesses are operating on a part-time basis. The strongest retail clusters are home accessory uses, personal and professional services and neighborhood/convenience uses. Largest downtown employment centers are the government complex, Sprint, Edgecombe Community College and financial institutions. Existing strengths include several long-time businesses, attractive streetscape, intact storefronts, lower rent structure and strong public and institutional uses. Liabilities include the condition of many vacant buildings, limited concentrations of uses and limited pedestrian connections between new public facilities and businesses.

Possible market opportunities/niche

Downtown's optimal mix of businesses depends on several factors including projected trade area demographics, strength of competing centers and the existing mix of commercial uses. Many people interviewed over the past year have envisioned downtown as a place that once again could have pedestrian-friendly shopping with a mixture of small and medium size office uses and ancillary specialty stores, restaurants and boutiques. While retail will never dominate the downtown again, it can have its place in the downtown. Downtown's office, service and professional uses also are important to the area's economic vitality. Based on a limited analysis of downtown Rocky Mount's market, the resource team has identified several possible markets for downtown businesses to better serve. These target markets include employees and church members, adjacent residential, community college students and staff, older residents, middle-upper income households, local employers. The team identified 5 business groups that could be strengthened through recruitment and targeted promotions. These store groups include restaurants, specialty furnishing and home decor, lifestyle specialty stores, personal service and neighborhood convenience uses.

Downtown can support additional restaurants. However, viability will be more a function of site selection, financing and securing qualified help than of market demand. Product quality and service delivery also is important to long-term viability. Future furniture sales are strongly influenced by housing growth and lifestyle changes. Given existing space and population projections for region, there should be some modest growth in this sector. There is strong opportunity for downtown to expand its product selection with specialty or lifestyle furniture and accessories and craft and antique stores that targets middle-income homeowners. Convenience and budget goods will continue to have a strong presence downtown, despite competition within the city. While many of these uses will target older residents and adjacent minority households, businesses that serve downtown employees and businesses also could be recruited. As the residential neighborhoods around downtown are improved, existing businesses should be encouraged to expand and improve product selection and quality.

In addition to retail, downtown should target employment centers and general business uses. Businesses that require meeting space or training facilities should be encouraged to locate downtown. Office recruitment should target small regional corporations and back office uses, professional, service and general business uses. Additional visitor attractions such as a Farmers Market, recreation center, auction house and wellness center should be recruited in addition to the planned performing art and museum space.

While the current market for housing is soft, there will be excellent opportunities to develop niche housing in downtown, either in upper floors of some buildings or as infill construction. Housing is a critical component of a viable downtown and the neighborhoods surrounding downtown need to be given every protection available, and additional units should be encouraged in the downtown proper.

DOWNTOWN PLAN

To be successful, a downtown development program needs a clearly defined plan. This plan must be visionary enough to excite the community, but realistic enough to be accomplished with available community resources. The plan should be based on market realities and existing conditions downtown. The plan also should build on the interests and desires of the existing leadership and volunteer base.

A typical plan includes a set of shared priorities for development, and a conceptual cluster plan that shows where businesses can be successfully located so as to maximize future investment. A successful plan also requires property owner support and several short and long-term strategies for attracting new uses and enhancing the existing commercial base.

Shared development goals

Based on interviews with staff and business leaders and our experience working with communities across the county, the consultants have identified six development goals for Rocky Mount to consider. These program goals are as follows:

- ❖ Downtown is a place of distinction (Maintain high standards for redevelopment)
- ❖ Downtown reflects Rocky Mount's historic and architectural character
- ❖ Downtown is center for art and culture, religious and educational opportunities
- ❖ Downtown is a center for furniture, home accessories and improvement uses
- ❖ Downtown is a convenience/service center for residents and businesses
- ❖ Downtown has a concentration of unique destination and lifestyle uses

Conceptual cluster plan

Rocky Mount should recruit new uses that will maximize customer traffic, not just fill vacancies. This concept, known as business clustering, is an economic development tool that has long been used by shopping malls. It involves grouping together a certain mix of businesses in such a way as to have them benefit from each other's sales, customers and markets. Through clustering, businesses are able to increase overall penetration rates and market share. Clustering also can encourage impulse shopping, which accounts for most of the retail sales in this country. As selective business clusters are promoted, some businesses will lose market and relocate to other areas. Other uses will be greatly enhanced. As these clusters are strengthened and promoted, recruitment of other complementary uses will become easier.

To get started, the resource team recommends that the project area be divided into five smaller concept zones. These proposed cluster areas will take time to develop and will require strategic business recruitment, general business skill enhancement and possible relocation of existing

businesses. A variety of incentives or “carrots” can be used to direct investment to these areas. The following map should be used as a starting point for developing a cluster plan. These five areas are 1) Educational center 2) Convenience goods and services 3) General employment 4) Cultural Activity and 5) Retail Center.

Property owner Agreements

The Main Street organization can’t assume that owners want or need their help. Initially efforts must focus on vacant buildings with cooperative owners. These owners should qualify for special incentives and grant programs. A property owner agreement (see attachment) can outline the type of assistance Main Street can offer as well as the owner’s responsibilities in selling or leasing. This agreement, while not legally binding, will help establish better understanding between the organization and property owners. “Main Street Opportunity” signs should be used to designate those buildings with active property owners.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Downtown needs a strong recruitment effort that will fill vacancies and strengthen existing business mix. GDS recommends that this strategy focus on implementing a general recruitment and property development effort. Initially this recruitment effort should focus on four areas, 1) improving existing referral system, 2) completing data gathering, 3) improve investor attitudes, 4) Improve tenant selection criteria. Property development should focus in the short-term on encouraging investment groups to purchase key properties, establish an office recruitment program and continue efforts to develop a cultural arts anchor downtown.

Recruitment effort

A successful recruitment program is much more than a leasing effort. It requires a strong image and promotion campaign as well as aggressive business retention program. These programs help improve overall investor confidence and make downtown a more attractive place for businesses to locate. A recruitment program must have the support of property owners and business leaders. Initially, a volunteer committee will be involved in all aspects of the recruitment process including the identification of prospects, identifying potential sites and negotiations with tenant and owners. Over time, the need for direct involvement will lessen. Specific activities that Rocky Mount could accomplish this year are:

(1) Improve existing prospect referral system

Generally more leads come from referrals and word of mouth advertising than through direct marketing efforts. Viable prospects are often lost because the lead was not followed or given to the appropriate person. Poor communication between real estate agencies or property owners also can hinder referral system. Main Street should work with local owners, realtors, lenders and government agencies to improve current communication between groups and develop a procedure to follow-up on leads. Possible overlap or competition between various agencies should be discussed and a policy established regarding possible downtown leads.

(2) Complete data analysis

The Main Street office has compiled extensive information on downtown buildings. This information should be combined with detailed market data available through the City’s GIS system and placed on a downtown website. This information would help realtors and owners establish rental rates and keep prospective tenants informed about space availability. In addition to this information, additional ancillary print materials such as info cards, recruitment flyers and brochures need to be developed. Information on technical, financial and promotional incentives

should be highlighted. While personal contact is still the most successful way to contact small businesses, printed material and websites also can be used to recruit stores.

(3) Improve investor attitude

Main Street should develop an image campaign to attract prospective business investors as well as reassure current property owners. To enhance awareness for downtown opportunities, the organization could hold regular forums on market trends and conduct regular focus group sessions with key market groups and expand regional awareness through a speaker's bureau that targets business organizations in adjacent communities.

(4) Improve tenant selection standards

In a shopping center, the leasing agent has control over the placement of specific stores. This type of control rarely exists downtown. Many individuals own downtown property, with competing interests and visions. Some property owners are not interested in improving their buildings. Downtown has a problem with "functional vacancies" or marginal uses that rent on a monthly basis. Beyond filling an immediate vacancy, these uses do little for downtown and undermine other owner's attempts to create a stronger business base. While tenant selection is ultimately the property owner's decision, the City and Main Street should play a more active role in encouraging owners to lease to qualified tenants through a program of voluntary support and persuasion and through existing rental incentives that give bonuses for key businesses. It is also important to work with local realtors to improve their understanding regarding desired tenant mix. The group, Downtown Renaissance, should be encouraged to use options to control key vacancies and allow time to find a better tenant.

Property development

Property development is a critical element of downtown's revitalization effort. Where owners are unable or unwilling to redevelop property, others must be encouraged to step in. As part of its overall recruitment effort Main Street Program should:

(1) Encourage private investment through the establishment of for-profit limited partnerships

In addition to Downtown Renaissance, Inc., Main Street should bring together interested investors to form a limited partnership that could work in tandem with non-profit development corporations or the city. This private investment group could use tax credits not available to the city or a non-profit corporation. This partnership should focus on two types of projects: a restaurant and office uses. Although this would be a for-profit venture, the group should be willing to take a bigger risk than an individual investor should and look for the long-term investment. Public Interest Projects, (Asheville N.C) would be a good model to use. This corporation is the primary impetus behind downtown Asheville's housing and specialty retail renaissance.

(2) Develop an office recruitment program

The Main Street Program should work with the city and interested property owners to develop a program that would provide affordable, Internet-ready office space to small corporations or technology companies. Although the recent downturn in the economy has slowed the Internet revolution, computer-technology companies will continue to be an important tenant for downtown. Working with staff from the city, chamber, and community colleges, Main Street should be part of a regional marketing effort to solicit and encourage small regional corporations and entrepreneurial businesses to locate downtown. Specific needs such as employee training, utility

and infrastructure and start-up financing should be addressed. The city should contribute funding to market the space to regional and national prospects. (example, see www.nycbiz.com)

(3) Continue efforts to develop cultural art center downtown

Cultural and entertainment uses are a vital part of a successful downtown effort. These uses are needed to anchor future residential, retail and restaurant uses. The city should be encouraged to continue its efforts to develop the Imperial Center and to look for ways to use this project to stimulate additional private investment in the area. The city may want to look at Roanoke, Virginia as a model for financing cultural uses. They have used cultural facilities as the centerpiece of their successful downtown revitalization program. Buildings were funded through a community foundation, with local performing arts and museums in charge of programming.

**POTENTIAL TENANTS
BY CLUSTER GROUP:
SPECIALTY GOODS**

1. Key anchors for clusters

- Cultural or performing art (exhibition, studio, performing, children's theater, workshops, etc.)
- Visitor attractions (a museum, visitor center, historic park, site or cemetery)
- Public market (expanded programming)
- Restaurants

2. Examples of business types (may already exist):

- Music store
- Audio equipment store
- Outdoor or specialty sporting goods
- "Paint your own" pottery
- Art or fine craft gallery
- Theme or ethnic restaurants
- Wedding or special occasion apparel
- Gift or eclectic lifestyle stores
- Specialty clothing
- Needle craft/specialty fabric
- Sporting goods
- Music
- Coffee house

3. Primary target markets:

- Middle income residents (over 50)
- White collar employees
- Regional households
- Visitors

**POTENTIAL TENANTS
BY CLUSTER GROUP:
HOUSEWARES AND DESIGN ACCESSORIES**

1. Key anchors for clusters

- Auction house
- Gift and antique emporium
- Furniture store

2. Examples of business types (may already exist):

- Light fixtures, lampshades
- Reproduction and original antiques
- Interior design studios
- Housewares
- Specialty furnishings
- Upholstery and drapery installer
- Pottery
- Nursery
- Kitchen and bath showroom
- Contractors' offices

3. Primary target markets:

- Regional new homeowners
- Middle income households in region
- Housing industry (contractors, designers)
- Visitors

**POTENTIAL TENANTS
BY CLUSTER GROUP:
CONVENIENCE GOODS AND SERVICES**

1. Key anchors for cluster

- Convenience stores
- Neighborhood grocery store
- Drug store
- Apartments/residents in area
- Office buildings

2. Examples of business types (may already exist):

- Restaurants
- Carry-out food
- Bakery
- Juice and smoothie bar
- Gift baskets
- Coffee Bar

- Diet center
- Hair salon
- Nail salon
- Spa, health club
- Ethnic or health food store
- Check Cashing
- Dry cleaners, Laundromat
- Repair services
- Medical services
- Pet grooming

3. Primary target markets:

- Employees in area
- Adjacent residential neighborhoods

EXAMPLE OF AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN OWNERS AND ORGANIZATION

1. PROPERTY OWNERS RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. GENERAL CLEAN-UP OF BUILDING'S INTERIOR

1. Building interior must be clean
 - floors must be swept
 - walls and ceiling should be washed
 - trash or display cases removed
 - building should be aired and cleaned
 - window and display areas must be clean
2. Exterior should be "spruced up"
 - old signs removed from building
 - exterior of building washed
 - sidewalk and inset door area swept and washed
 - rotted awning removed

B. PROVIDE PROPERTY INFORMATION

1. Property owners shall provide leasing information
 - square footage
 - condition of heating and air
 - rent and leasing options
2. Property owner shall determine necessary code improvement costs
 - permit building inspector to inventory of code improvements
 - determine amount of tenant upfit allowance

C. OWNER WILL AGREE TO ACTIVELY LIST PROPERTY

- property owner will list property
- provide one month commission and
- place sign in window
- property owner agrees to let Main Street office assist in leasing
- permit Main Street staff to show property
- permit Main Street to place sign in window

2. MAIN STREET PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. PREPARE AND DISTRIBUTE LEASING PACKETS

1. Main Street will develop informational material
 - multiple listing service
 - packet containing demographic information
2. Main Street will regularly distribute material
 - adjacent businesses
 - realtors, local lenders, accountants, and financial planners

B. ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING COMMITTEE WILL CONTACT PROSPECTS

1. **Main Street will solicit leads for available space from outside the district**

- identify prospects that is suitable to space
- visit potential stores
- prepare background information on prospects

2. Main Street will assist in store leasing

- list available space in classified ad
- place sign in window
- show space when owner is away

C. PROVIDE DESIGN AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

1. Main Street will provide design assistance

- provide facade drawings
- provide sign or facade grant

2. Main Street will provide financial assistance

- prepare investment tax credit applications
- target low interest loan programs
- feasibility studies

D. PROVIDE FOLLOW-UP ASSISTANCE FOR TENANT

1. Main Street will provide merchandising assist

- workshops, seminars
- small business round tables

2. Main Street will provide advertising assistance

- grand opening and new business story
- co-op advertisements and discounts

Planning Tools for Downtown Rocky Mount

Victor Sharpe, AICP

The City of Rocky Mount has five historic districts listed on the National Register. The Central City Historic District is located in the downtown, while the others are partially included in the Central City area or are in close proximity.

Of the five National Register Districts only one (Rocky Mount Mill Village) is currently a locally designated historic district. Designation as a locally designated historic district is great way to preserve the built environment. There is consideration of local designation of the Villa Place Historic District and the Central City Historic District. The designation of these districts is critical and is highly recommended.

The current Historic District and Landmarks Overlay District's purpose is to preserve, protect and manage locally designated historic districts and landmarks. The regulations within the historic districts are intended to protect against destruction of structures; to encourage uses, which will lead to their continuance, conservation and improvement; to prevent creation of environmental influences adverse to purposes; and to assure that new structures and uses within the historic districts will be in keeping with the character to be preserved and enhanced.

Downtown Rocky Mount has a great resource of historic buildings in its downtown. Unfortunately many of them are experiencing deterioration through neglect and lack of maintenance. Designation of the Central City Historic District will enable the City to establish tools to break the cycle of deterioration by neglect.

The Central City Revitalization Panel's vision statement starts and end with a powerful message respectively: "Our downtown is unique and worth preserving." & "We're proud of our downtown."

"If you have something and you want to keep it for the future, preserve it. If you have grapes and want to keep them, you might want to make wine, or you might dry them and make raisins. Eventually, however, raisins will dry up and blow away. Fine wine will last centuries, if properly handled." Richard L. Austin – Adaptive Reuse, 1988.

Recommended Tools

- Designate the Central City Historic District as a local historic district. (Under consideration)
- Designate Villa Place as a local historic district. (Under consideration)
- Adopt Deterioration by Neglect Ordinance. (Under consideration)
- Continue efforts of Community Assistance Response Team.
- Identify and promote historic properties worthy of local landmark status.
- Establish a community education program on historic preservation and City history.
- Establish Design Guidelines. (Under consideration)
- Complete Downtown Master Plan with emphasis being placed on implementation. (Under consideration)

Business Development Incentives

Main Street Business Incentive Program

- Designed to improve the image and appearance of Rocky Mount District for residents and visitors entering the Central City Area. (Existing program)

Main Street Major Impact Grant

- Designed to provide inducements to encourage businesses to locate within distressed areas, create jobs & increase tax base.
- \$10,000 per project for exterior improvements to commercial property fronting Main Street
- Must create or retain at least one permanent job.

Rental Assistance Grant Program

- Designed to provide inducements to encourage businesses to locate within distressed areas, create jobs & increase tax base.
- Available for new retail business locating in the Central City business district
- Matching rent grants of up to \$48,000 for initial 2 years
- Must create or retain at least one permanent job for every \$500 per month of rental assistance.
- This is a very creative business incentive.

Historic Preservation Tax Credits

- State and federal tax credits may be used to reduce state and federal income taxes. (Available through the State Historic Preservation Office)
 - **North Carolina Preservation Tax Credits** – 20% state income tax credit for income-producing certified historic structures. A 30% state income tax credit for certified rehabilitations of non-income-producing certified historic structures including personal residences.
 - **Federal Preservation Tax Credits** – 20% federal tax credit for certified rehabilitations of income-producing certified historic structures. A 10% federal income tax credit for rehabilitations of income-producing non-historic structures built before 1936 and used for non-residential purposes.

State Development Zone

- Purpose is to stimulate investment & job creation to improve conditions in the high poverty areas.
- Existing program
- Tax credit for job creation
 - **Tier One** (Edgecombe County)
 - \$12,500 credit per job
 - **Tier Four** (Nash County)
 - \$1,000 credit per job

Identify historic properties worthy of local landmark status.

- Property should be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Property does not have to be located in a locally designated historic district.
- A 50% property tax deferral is allowed.
- New program

Enterprise Community (Edgecombe County)

- Real estate development
- Small business skills development
- Home ownership counseling
- Existing program

Create a Central City Loan Pool

- Shared risk loan pool rather than a low interest loan pool
- New program

ROCKY MOUNT MAIN STREET TRANSPORTATION NOTES

Stephen Stansbery, AICP, Kimley-Horn

1. Parking: (See June 2002 Parking Inventory)

- Appears to be ample public parking for current conditions;
- As occupancy increases, enforcement parking policy will need to be revisited.
- Wayfinding to public lots could be improved through improved signage.
- Aesthetics and lighting of public parking lots should be evaluated.
- Consider location for public parking lot on east side of downtown.
- Structured parking is not required at this time.
- Streets with surplus capacity could be modified to include on-street parking where feasible.



2. Railroad:

- First train 1860, not likely to end anytime in the near future.
- Amtrak and freight service
- The relocation, burying, or lowering of the railroad would likely be cost prohibitive (hundreds of millions). Train frequency is relatively high (approximately __ trains per day).
- Current at-grade crossings (5) provide critical east-west connections between both sides of downtown.
- A need exists to improve the design of these crossing to enhance vehicular and pedestrian safety.
- Rather than “turning back” on the rail line, consider celebrating this space with active pedestrian use.
- Consider “greening” of rail line...street trees and multipurpose path parallel to tracks.
- Convert “spur-lines” that are not in use to “rails to trails”... connect to City greenway system and incorporate into local bike plan.



3. Pedestrian Accommodations:

- Current sidewalk infrastructure has excellent scale along most streets (5-15 feet).
- Inventory should be performed to determine location of critical “gaps” in existing network.
- Repair and maintenance: sidewalks should maintain minimum ADA and NC Accessibility Code standards. Minimum clear width of 5 feet should be sought throughout the pedestrian network, obstacles should be removed/relocated when feasible (utilities and other fixed obstructions – ex. transit stop on SE Main Street at Sunset Ave).
- Design elements such as “bulb-outs” should be considered when streetscape projects or other major road modifications occur in order to reduce pedestrian crossing distances.



- Pedestrian crossings should be evaluated for enhancement and maintenance. The use of high visibility crosswalks, and pedestrian signals should be considered for locations where warranted.

4. Transit:

With the development of a Downtown Master Plan, transit routes and stops should be examined for compatibility.



5. *One –Way Streets*

Downtown Rocky Mount has a number of one-way streets including the Business 64 one-way couplet (Sunset Avenue eastbound – Thomas Street westbound) and Business 301 one-way couplet (Church Street northbound – Franklin Street southbound). Both of these couplets are classified as thoroughfares on the Urban Area's adopted Thoroughfare Plan. While these arterials function as the foundation of the downtown transportation network, a number of local and collector streets within the downtown are likewise configured for one-way operations. This system has served the community well over the years as it relates to the movement of traffic during peak periods through the downtown. However, the reduction in employment in the CBD and implementation of US 64 and 301 Bypasses has had a dramatic impact on traffic volumes throughout the downtown vicinity. As the community begins to examine the importance of downtown and ways to revitalize the city's central business district, the need for the one-way street network should be examined.

Background:

A change in thinking regarding downtown traffic control and circulation is taking place throughout the US, and is exemplified by the one-way street debate. In the 1950s and 60s, one-way streets were implemented across the US, including Rocky Mount, in an attempt to rid downtown of traffic congestion. The relative efficiency of one-way streets in moving traffic reduced congestion without street widening or the construction of new facilities. Many streets were converted to one-way couplets before freeways were built to improve vehicle access to downtowns but were not converted back to two-way operations after freeways were built in the 60s, 70s and 80s.



During the 1990s, a trend around the US has been to convert some one-way streets back to two-way operations. It is not that the one-way street strategy failed. However, the prevailing wisdom is that two-way streets can enhance a neighborhood's environment, reduce speeds to levels that are more compatible with pedestrian traffic, and that a "busy" street can be an indicator of a healthy business environment. There are pros and cons of one-way streets and two-way streets, but one must recognize that they will differ

from one City or street to another.

Many cities throughout the country have converted one-way streets in the Central City back to two-way operations. In North Carolina, communities such as Durham,

Greensboro, Raleigh, Charlotte, Asheville, Jacksonville are considering or have already converted downtown streets back to two-way operations.

Need and Potential Benefits of Conversion Project

The Rocky Mount Central City is comprised of a mix of historic urban multi-story buildings and suburban scale office, institutional, and service related businesses surrounded by residential neighborhoods with smaller commercial districts on the periphery. The Central City historically was the largest employment center in the region; however, for many reasons, there are few major employers remaining in the downtown except such notables as Sprint Communications, the City of Rock Mount, Edgecomb Community College, and RBC Centura Bank. During weekday peak hours, a substantial number of commuters utilize these one-way streets to access jobs from outlying areas of the region. During off-peak hours, a relatively low volume of traffic is experienced on downtown streets. With the exception of Grace Street and George Street, nearly all of the arterials in the downtown have recorded 24-hour volumes of less than 6,000 vehicles per day (vpd) resulting in excess capacity throughout the downtown network. Relatively low traffic volumes, excess capacity and one-way orientation, typically results in traffic speeds and circulation patterns that are not supportive of pedestrian scale walkable communities. For this reason, an evaluation of potential alternatives is recommended.

The intent of a two-way conversion project is typically to improve livability by reducing the impact of traffic in residential neighborhoods and places of commerce, which promotes safe and pleasant conditions for all users of local streets. Two-way streets tend to reduce travel speed, increase safety for pedestrians and improve bicycle access. Yet such efforts must always be balanced with the need to allow the City's economic engine, the Central Business District, to revitalize and grow.

A study of Rocky Mount's Downtown Transportation Network could provide the following:

- A review of all the one-way streets in the Central City and define a full range of "conversion options" (i.e. segments of one-way couplets or streets that could potentially be converted to two-way operations).
- A screening process to focus the study on conversion options that are feasible for conversion.
- The pros and cons of the conversion options.
- A priority list of transportation improvement for the downtown.

Study Objectives:

The Transportation Study should identify and evaluate potential conversion options and select projects for implementation that strive to meet the following objectives:

- Enhanced neighborhood livability and downtown vitality.
- Supports continued revitalization of the commercial area of the CBD.
- Promotes a safe, pedestrian friendly environment.
- Is feasible and can be implemented.
- Is developed with stakeholder and community participation.
- Maintains a viable multimodal strategy.
- Supports a balanced transportation system.

6. Other recommendations:

An alternate set of street design standards should be considered for the downtown vicinity. This alternate standard should focus on designs that support balanced mobility with an emphasis on pedestrian safety, appropriate scale, and urban design.

Organization

Rodney Swink, FASLA

Organization is key to a successful downtown organization. Rocky Mount has many of the pieces in place to give it maximum structural flexibility. But it is still evolving. The key to long-term success will be having a public/private partnership guiding the effort.

The city has taken a proactive position in downtown development. They have helped to structure deals, they have purchased property and they have funded projects, with additional commitments made. They have made it known that they are interested in and committed to a successful downtown. The city council appointed the Central City Revitalization Panel (CCRP) to help develop a downtown program.

Today the Central City Revitalization Panel has lead responsibility for downtown development. Their charge initially was to review proposals for redevelopment and façade grants. They have also taken on broader duties as the program has grown. They are presently positioned to be the lead organization and focal point for the overall downtown development effort.

Downtown Renaissance, Inc. (DRI) is a non-profit corporation that is able to initiate development, take title to property, and serve as an agent for building rehab. Rocky Mount is fortunate to have this organization and the flexibility it brings. It has been in place a number of years and lately has reassessed its mission and renewed its focus. We believe that DRI should be utilized to facilitate development that otherwise may not occur. Having collateral representation between CCRP and DRI, as well as the city, is critical to developing a close working relationship.

Currently DRI does not have staff. In time, it may be desirable to add staff or to consider merging the efforts of the CCRP and DRI to maximize resources. Their missions are different and supportive and equally important. This suggestion does not imply that either is dispensable; neither is. Rather it is the structure of a non-profit development corporation that may be the best long-term structure for sustainable success.

There are other key players in downtown as well. Rocky Mount/Edgecombe CDC has been leading the revitalization of much of downtown for years. Their work has been exemplary and continues to be a model for quality rehabilitation. The Chamber of Commerce has committed to downtown by locating their headquarters in the rehabbed train station, and they also provide support for business development and recruitment. The City Planning Department is undergoing a downtown master planning process that promises to bring additional light to critical actions needed. The city has a Redevelopment Authority that can be called upon to take on development efforts that may not fit other areas. And both counties have been project partners on occasion and should be involved as often as possible in development discussions.

All in all, Rocky Mount has many of the parts needed for successful development. What have been missing have been the overall plan, direction and public/private leadership and focus for private development.

Summary

This report is intended to summarize the observations and recommendations of the North Carolina Main Street team members from their short visit to Rocky Mount. There are many more issues that could be raised and more questions to be answered. Our intent is to give focus to your next steps and to give you a basis on which to make decisions. The choices are yours. Review these ideas, debate them, but by all means, act upon them.

Team Biographical Information

Hilary Greenberg

Ms. Greenberg is the president of Greenberg Development Services (GDS), a fifteen year planning and marketing firm that provides technical assistance to downtown organizations, business associations and local governments dealing with downtown development issues. Greenberg Development Services has developed retail leasing plans, business recruitment strategies and retention programs for downtown and neighborhood commercial areas across the country.

Typical downtown market studies prepared by GDS include an assessment of demographic and economic conditions for specific trade area locations, a projection of retail sales and identification of market opportunities. Most projects also include detailed business recruitment and retention plans based on identified opportunities and existing business mix.

Ms. Greenberg is a frequent speaker at national and state conferences on the topic of business development and retail recruitment. She has conducted workshops for a variety of state and national downtown associations and is a frequent instructor at the National Main Street's Project Manager Institute.

Perry Howard, FASLA

Perry Howard is the Landscape Architecture Program Coordinator and Professor of Landscape Architecture at NC A&T State University. He specializes in Project, Office and Land Use Data Management Systems, Residential, Institutional, Commercial, Office and Recreational Design, as well as Resort Development, Central Area Public Space Design, Land Use Planning and Natural Systems Resource Assessment. Prior to teaching, Mr. Howard worked in private practice, most recently as Vice President of Edward D. Stone, Jr. and Associates in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

Mr. Howard is a frequent participant on community design charrettes and shares his time and talents throughout the state. He is a Fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects. He has a Masters of Landscape Architecture from Harvard University and a Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from Louisiana State University.

Donovan D. Rypkema

Donovan Rypkema is principal of **Place Economics**, a firm originally established in 1975 as the Real Estate Services Group. Mr. Rypkema has performed real estate and economic development consulting services throughout the United States for state and local governments and non-profit organizations with interests in a broad range of properties, from National Historic Landmark Structures to Main Street commercial centers. His specific fields of consultation include: feasibility analyses for real estate acquisition and development; training in community-based development; economic revitalization of downtowns and neighborhood commercial centers; and the rehabilitation of historic structures.

Today Mr. Rypkema is recognized as an industry leader in the economics of preserving historic structures. Since 1983 he has provided ongoing consulting services to the National Trust for Historic Preservation (where he was a member of the Board of Advisors from 1982 to 1985) and its National Main Street Center. He has undertaken assignments in 49 states and the District of Columbia, and on a worldwide level Rypkema has worked directly with government and business leaders in Japan, Thailand, and Russia and he has spoken at international conferences in Australia, Brazil, China, Canada, England, Italy, Portugal, and Saudi Arabia.

Rypkema was educated at Columbia University where he received a Masters of Science degree in Historic Preservation. He has lectured widely on economic and preservation issues relating to rehabilitation, community development and commercial revitalization. He is author of several

publications including *Community Initiated Development*, *The Economics of Rehabilitation*, the *Downtown Real Estate Development Series* and others and the book, *The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide*.

Rypkema has worked with such groups as the Urban Land Institute, the Mayors' Institute on City Design, the American Planning Association, the International Downtown Association, International Town and City Centre Conference, the World Monuments Fund, the Center for Livable Communities and hundreds of other international, national, statewide and local organizations.

Stephen M. Stansbery, AICP

Mr. Stansbery is a certified professional planner with over 8 years of land use and transportation planning experience. Mr. Stansbery holds a master's degree in City and Regional Planning from the Ohio State University and BS in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences from Florida State University. He is currently the Senior Transportation Planner with Kimley-Horn and Associates (Triad Office). His primary expertise includes community transportation planning, specifically the development of multimodal transportation plans as well as collector street plans and traffic calming strategies.

Mr. Stansbery's passion for downtown planning and neighborhood planning has lead to his participation on a number of recent urban design projects in places such as, Asheville; Raleigh; New Bern; Greenville, SC; Buena Vista, Va; Mint Hill, NC; Troutman, NC; and Hendersonville, NC to name a few. In addition to urban design, Mr. Stansbery has been an advocate for walkable communities and supportive of traditional town planning. He also serves as a member of a consultant team updating the NC Multimodal Transportation Plan, and has assisted with the development of comprehensive plans for communities throughout the state.

Victor D. Sharpe, AICP

Victor Sharpe is the Planning Services Manager for the City of Fayetteville, a position he has held since 1997. Prior to that he was Director of Planning and Community Development in Elizabeth City, NC. While there he was called on to serve a six-month tenure as Interim City Manager. He was actively involved in the early development of Elizabeth City's Main Street program as city planner. Mr. Sharpe is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners, the American Planning Association, the NC Association of Planning & the Black Community, Preservation NC, and the NC African American Network on Historic Preservation. He is frequently called upon to work with communities and neighborhood groups on preservation, planning and revitalization issues. He has a Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Planning from East Carolina University.

Rodney L. Swink, FASLA

Rodney Swink is the Director of the Office of Urban Development in the NC Department of Commerce where he has headed the NC Main Street Program since 1984. He is also a Visiting Lecturer in the College of Design at North Carolina State University and a guest lecturer at other area universities.

Mr. Swink is the immediate past president of the American Society of Landscape Architects, as well as the immediate past president of the North Carolina Partners of the Americas. A former chairman of the Raleigh Appearance Commission, he currently serves as an advisor to both Preservation North Carolina and Scenic North Carolina and is on the board of the North Carolina Downtown Development Association. Mr. Swink has a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and a Masters in Landscape Architecture, both from North Carolina State University.